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**TRUST**

## NOTES FROM VIDEO







## SECTION ONE: GOD'S DILEMMA

All religious or faith systems have histories, but most people are more interested in their personal faith experiences than they are in their personal faith's *history*. For example, most Christians know very little about the history of the early church. They can tell you what they don't like about their current church. But once you get beyond their personal church experiences, they don't have a lot to add to the conversation. That's true of most faith traditions. Religious people are generally more concerned with getting God to answer their prayers than they are with where the concept of a prayer-answering God came from originally. And that's unfortunate, because *faith based on personal experience alone eventually buckles under the weight of personal experience*. Perhaps that's your story.

Three major faith traditions share the same starting point. Consequently, there is a good bit of overlap in their views of how God views humanity. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all agree that God created humanity in his image—the implication being there is something divine in each of us. All three religions agree that in the beginning God and man lived in harmony.

Another point of agreement is that God

gave humanity the capacity to say yes and no to their Creator. Free will. These three ancient religions teach that early in the history of humanity, somebody said no. When that happened, sin entered the world and nothing since then has been as good as it was intended to be. The cost of sin is death. That's because humanity's relationship with God was broken. Sin ruptured the harmony. Sin has been rupturing harmony ever since.

The introduction of sin into the human experience left God with somewhat of a dilemma. It's probably not completely accurate to speak of God as having a dilemma. But best we can tell, he had a choice to make: *destroy this sin-infected world and start over, or roll up his sleeves and go to work fixing it*. Instead of walking away, he waded in. Where does one begin the task of restoring the world from the effects of sin? If you've ever knocked over a gallon of paint in your living room or dropped a two-quart glass container of salsa on your kitchen floor, you get the picture. You were probably tempted to move. But you didn't. You just picked a starting point and began cleaning.

God did the same thing. But instead of starting at a particular place, he started with a particular man. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all agree that God began the cleanup process with Abraham.

Our God is an expert at dealing with chaos, with brokenness, with all the worst that we can imagine. God created order out of disorder, cosmos out of chaos, and God can do so always, can do so now - in our personal lives and in our lives as nations, globally.

 Desmond Tutu





- 1 Why do you believe what you believe? Consider people, circumstances, places, etc.
- 2 Have your personal experiences ever caused you to doubt or change your beliefs?
- 3 Why is sin so problematic for God?

[illegible]

 Marshall McLuhan

## SECTION TWO: GOD'S PROMISES

The story of Abraham begins around 1876 BC, long before Jesus or the prophet Muhammad, long before Moses and the Ten Commandments. Abraham was a man of wealth and influence. He had land, cattle, and servants. But there was one thing he didn't have: a son. In Abraham's culture, having a son—an heir—was a big deal. He would have traded everything he had for one son. That's why when God told him to pack up and leave the country in which he'd grown up, he did so.

Abraham wasn't a perfect man. In fact, he was deeply flawed. Genesis records that he lied and cheated. Sometimes his faith in God was shaky. We'll never know why God chose Abraham as his first step in reconnecting with humanity. But we do know that God didn't wait for a perfect man to come along before he got started.

God's interaction with Abraham started with three promises.

Promise 1 "I will make you into a great nation." - Genesis 12:2

This came as a shock to Abraham. He was an old man at the time. His wife, Sarah, was beyond her childbearing years, and they had no children. God didn't simply promise Abraham a child. He promised

that from him would come an entire nation! And that's exactly what happened. Israel, along with several Arab nations, claims Abraham as its father.

Promise 2 "and I will bless you; I will make your name great" - Genesis 12:2

Another way of saying that is, *I will make you well-known, famous*. That happened as well. Chances are you had heard of Abraham before signing up for Starting Point. How about Zoar? Heard of him? No? King Chedorlaomer? Don't feel bad. Their names all but disappeared a generation or two after state funerals. But Abraham? Just about everybody has heard of the nomad Abraham.

The third promise God made to Abraham intersects with our modern era as well.

Now that's a big promise. Not only would the world know Abraham's name, the world would be "blessed" through him. Literally, the world would be better off because of Abraham. It would have been one thing if God had promised that the

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**The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.**



Ernest Hemingway



people of Abraham's future nation would be blessed through him. But the promise was bigger than that. Much bigger. According to this promise, every people group on the planet would somehow be better off because of Abraham.

Every Jewish man, woman, and child who has ever lived is certainly better off because of Abraham. All people from the Arab nations that trace their lineages to Abraham would probably agree that they are better off. Muslims hold Abraham in high regard. Christians from every generation believe they are better off because of Abraham. Now consider the people groups who have been blessed directly or indirectly by the work, writings, discoveries, inventions, medical care, charity, and personal relationships with people from those groups. That's a lot of people. It may be everybody.

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**Trusting God completely means having faith that he knows what is best for your life. You expect Him to keep His promises, help you with problems, and do the impossible when necessary.**

 Rick Warren



## SECTION TWO:

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 Do you think it was hard for Abraham to believe God's promises?  
Why or why not?
- 2 What do you think of God choosing someone as imperfect as Abraham?
- 3 If you could hear one promise from God, what would you want it to be?

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**[I] know that love is ultimately the only answer to mankind's problems . . .**

 Martin Luther King, Jr.



## SECTION THREE: COMING CLEAN

Even though God made Abraham three promises, Abraham didn't know how things would turn out. So, he did what we would do. He worried. Abraham and Sarah were still hoping for a son. Without a male heir, Abraham's chief servant, Eliezer, would inherit everything. The writer of Genesis tells us that one evening while Abraham was sharing these concerns with God, God spoke.

Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." - Genesis 15:4-5

As encouraging as that must have sounded, it didn't change the fact that Abraham and Sarah were old and childless. So Abraham had to decide whether to believe that God would keep this unbelievable promise. Abraham's belief dilemma set the stage for one of the most important statements found in the Scriptures. What followed was a declaration and clarification concerning the starting point for humanity's relationship with God.

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. - Genesis 15:6

To state it another way, righteousness was credited to, or applied to, Abraham because he believed God's promise. If someone were to ask if you were righteous, chances are you would say no. We associate righteousness (or right standing with God) with good or perfect behavior. So how could righteousness be credited or applied to Abraham? That's an important question. Families have been divided and wars have been fought over that question. What does it mean that righteousness was credited to Abraham?

As the story of salvation continues to unfold through the Old and New Testaments, the answer to that question becomes increasingly clear. Abraham was given the same rights and privileges with God that a perfectly righteous man would gain through his perfect acts of righteousness. Instead of earning a right standing with God through right actions, Abraham had it gifted to him in response

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**God's promises are like the stars; the darker the night the brighter they shine.**

David Nicholas

to his faith. Long before the Ten Commandments were given to Moses, Abraham was given the label “righteous,” not because of anything he had done—he was a sinner just like everyone else—but because he believed.

Two thousand years later, the apostle Paul would make a connection between Abraham’s single act of faith and those seeking a right standing with God in his generation.

This is why “it was credited to him [Abraham] as righteousness.” The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. - Romans 4:22-24

Paul’s point? The righteousness available to Abraham is available to you as well. The means by which you attain a right standing with God is the same as well: faith. A single expression of faith.

If the notion of God granting something as important as righteousness on such simple terms is hard to believe, that’s understandable. Relationally speaking, it’s unprecedented. Maintaining a good standing with people requires that we behave a certain way. Other than our mommas, virtually no one extends that kind of unconditional acceptance. Is it possible that God would do such a thing?

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**When we contemplate the whole globe as one great dewdrop, striped and dotted with continents and islands, flying through space with other stars all singing and shining together as one, the whole universe appears as an infinite storm of beauty.**

 John Muir

## SECTION THREE: QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 How do you know when someone really believes something?
- 2 What is the significance of Abraham being declared righteous?
- 3 What do you believe it takes for God to accept someone?




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**God loves each of us as if there were only one of us**

 St. Augustine



## BOTTOM LINES FOR PART 3

-  The introduction of sin into the human experience left God with a choice. Instead of walking away, he waded into the mess.
-  God's solution to the problem of sin began with the three promises he made to one man.
-  The righteousness available to Abraham through faith is also available to us.

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**In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.**

 Albert Einstein

